



A Park in Flames

Scientists in Yellowstone Park expected the summer of 1988 to be an ordinary summer - cool and wet. But the weather was not what they expected. This would be the driest summer in 112 years.

Fires began easily in the dry weather. Some fires were started by lightning. Others were caused by careless people. The fires ate up leaves, logs, and pine needles. The flames gained strength as they moved. They destroyed everything in their paths.

“Why don’t the park **officials** do something?” one woman cried. “Why don’t they send out firefighters to stop the blazes?”

Park Policy

For over one hundred years the National Park Service had fought all fires in Yellowstone as soon as they started. But **scientists** began to feel that this was a mistake. They thought that fires were nature's way of cleaning out the forest.

In 1972, park **policy** changed. The Park Service would fight fires started by humans. Fires started **naturally** by lightning would be allowed to burn. Only if natural fires **threatened** lives or property would they be fought. So when the fires in Yellowstone Park began in June, 1988, park officials battled only some of the blazes. But the fires kept growing and growing.

People who lived in nearby towns complained that the fires were burning out of control. They feared the fires would drive away the **tourists**. "We'd see the fire get bigger and bigger, and they wouldn't do a thing about it," said one motel owner.



Out of Control

On July 21, Yellowstone officials declared war on all fires in the park. By then, the fires were huge. The flames threatened buildings and tourist centers.

Nine thousand firefighters poured into Yellowstone. Some came in helicopters. They tried to fight the fire from the air. Others stayed on the ground. They came with **bulldozers** and chain saws. They hurried to clear wide strips of land. The workers hoped these strips would stop the fires.

Day after day, the firefighters battled the flames. But they could not put them out. The weather was just too dry and windy.

The Battle Continues

On September 9, the fires were still burning. Firefighters fought to save the historic park buildings. They sprayed the famous Old Faithful Inn with water and chemicals. The 200-foot wall of flames roared closer. The firefighters ran to safety. When the smoke cleared, they were glad to see that the hotel still stood. The large parking lot around it had protected it.

By mid-September, Yellowstone Park was completely closed to visitors. Many people **criticized** the Park Service. They thought officials had waited too long to begin fighting the fires.

Others blamed the high winds and drought. Of the thirteen big fires in Yellowstone, eight had been fought from the start. All eight were still burning. "Even with every **weapon**, men cannot always put out a wildfire," one official said.

As the fall weather set in, the fires did slow down. But they didn't die until the November snow came. It



was nature itself that finally put out the blazes. By then, one-fifth of the park had been blackened.

Some people thought the fires were a terrible disaster. They felt that park officials should have acted more quickly. But scientists disagreed.

"These fires are natural events," said scientist James Schmitt. Scientists thought that in the long run the fires might be good for the park. The flames burned the biggest, driest trees. That left room for new trees to grow.

Whether good or bad, the results of the summer of 1988 will be with us for many years.

Do You Remember?

■ Read each sentence below. Write T if the sentence is true. Write F if the sentence is false.

1. ____ The summer of 1988 was very wet in Yellowstone.
2. ____ Some of the fires were started by lightning.
3. ____ Gusts of wind made the fires easier to control.
4. ____ The Park Service policy was to only fight fires started by humans.
5. ____ Firefighters tried to stop the fires by clearing strips of land.
6. ____ The famous Old Faithful Inn was completely destroyed.
7. ____ Nine thousand firefighters could not put out the fires.
8. ____ The fires were finally put out by snow in November.

Critical Thinking – Finding the Sequence

■ Number the sentences to show the order in which things happened in the story. The first one is done for you.

- ____ Many firefighters came in to fight the fires.
- ____ Fires were started by lightning and careless people.
- ____ The fires died out when the winter snows came.
- ____ Yellowstone officials declared war on the fires.
- 1 Scientists expected 1988 to be cool and wet.

Exploring Words

■ Write the correct word in each sentence.

officials
bulldozers

threatened
scientists

policy
weapon

tourist
events

criticized
naturally

1. Machines that move dirt are called _____.
2. _____ are things that happen.
3. People who study science are _____.
4. The rules or _____ about fighting fires changed in 1972.
5. People who are in charge of something are called _____.
6. A _____ travels to places for fun.
7. To be put in danger is to be _____.
8. A _____ is something to fight with.
9. If something happens _____, it is caused by nature.
10. People _____ or found fault with the Park Service.